

Introduction

The design for all proposals is very similar. A proposal needs to show a reasonably informed reader why a particular topic is important to address and how you will do it. You are proposing to show how your work fits into what is already known about the topic and what potential or new contribution your work will make.

The following notes are a guide to writing a research proposal. It includes a model for the structure of your proposal, but proposal and supervisor expectations vary and even this proposal may be a variation on the following basic structure. Use these guidelines as a point of departure and from discussions with your group and supervisor/advisor.

Proposal Writing

Proposal writing is important to your pursuit of a graduate degree. In this case you are not being asked to do a research project but as a group to carefully and innovatively set up a potential project about the topic “The Effects of Massage”. To all intents and purposes, a research proposal is an intellectual and academic contract between you and your supervising committee. It specifies:

- **What you will do to research the question you have developed?**
- **Why it should be done?**
- **How your study will link to other knowledge?**
- **How you will go about researching your topic?**
- **What you expect will result?**
- **How you will interpret and write up the results of your search?**

Specifying what will be done also produces criteria for determining whether it - the research - is possible to do. A research proposal normally goes through a committee process so that what you select to research is deemed a valid and useful project, and your participants in the research are safe from harm. The committee also gives their expert feedback and judgment about your approach to the research and whether it is reasonable and likely to yield the anticipated results.

At this level (Level 6) your research project is not expected to “break new ground” but to demonstrate a systematic approach to an enquiry – to this end you need to spend some careful time on reading what other people are writing and saying about your selected topic and also develop a carefully thought about question – which actually holds “anticipated” results. It is usually the case that from these anticipated results, you will start to find new perspectives or approaches to your selected field of enquiry.

As with any other field of study, writing a research proposal requires skills building and application. Being clear about the proposal process from the beginning will help you complete your assessment and eventually further study in a methodical and appropriate way. A vague, weak or fuzzy proposal can lead to a long, painful, and often unsuccessful research venture. A clean, well thought-out, proposal forms a backbone for your work.

The structure of a proposal and that of a research study are almost identical.

Some more important notes and encouragement to READ a lot!!

A good research proposal hinges on a good idea. Once you have a good idea, you can draft a satisfactorily interesting question. Getting a good idea hinges on familiarity with your topic. This assumes a longer preparatory period of **reading, observation, discussion, and incubation**. Read everything that you can in your area of interest. (It is critical that you develop a critical thinking mind:

- To discern what is quality reading and referencing and what is not/ speculative.
- To build support for a fairly new research arena – in this way we are already breaking new ground! I.e. the effects of massage are largely unwritten about at this level.

Figure out what are the important and missing parts of our understanding. Figure out how to build/discover those missing pieces. Live and breathe your topic. Talk about it with anyone who is interested – actually try talking about it with anybody who is not that interested and see if you can make them more interested!

Random activity: Bullet point or Mind Map some recurring and significant points - about what others are saying in response as well as descriptions of the ones you (or your group) are holding onto what you are trying to say.

Then write the important parts into your proposal using the following structures the proposal. By filling in the things that you do not (yet) know and making the effort to articulate the gaps in your understanding will help you know more: that is what the skill of researching is all about.

Proposals help you estimate the size of a project and you do not want your project to get too big (unless you have a source of excellent funding?). Your proposal will be a much shorter output. Maximum five – six pages It is the merit of the proposal which counts, not the word count Make your already expert reader certain that that you know the topic and how the proposed study logically hangs together, rather than oversize a proposal indicating that even though you may have read a lot, you don't yet have the skill to boil it down to a set of prioritised links to your question and enquiry. The proposal is a way of bringing your study into a specifically tailored focus.

THE MODEL FOR PROPOSAL WRITING IN A GROUP – Assessment Task 2

Model for the research proposal

This model is for a brief (two page) proposal that you might use to interest the whole Social Services Faculty in selecting your research study. People who are not yet hooked may especially appreciate its brevity.

1. **The group(s) names**
2. **Contents list of your proposal**
3. **Title of the Study** – The Effects of Massage on/ and/ reflects/ shows/.....

A good title will clue the reader into the topic but it cannot tell the whole story. Follow the title with a strong introduction.

4. **Introduction**

- Your first paragraph is an introduction. What is your proposal about? Get specific about what your research will address. The explanation of your topic consists of a:
 - First sentence that identifies the general topic area
 - Second sentence that gives the research question
 - Third sentence that establishes the **significance** of your proposed study

So- it is really important to specify the question that your research will answer. By establishing why it is a significant question and how you are going to answer the question you can then indicate what you expect others will learn. The proposal should situate the work in the literature or theoretical framework. This is problematic for massage therapists because a lot of their work is practice based with few (so far!), research studies written about. Your question needs to show why this is an (if not the most) important question to answer in the field as well as convince your committee (sceptical readers that they are) that your approach will in fact result in an answer to the question and even maybe why you should be eligible for future funding.

5. **Previous research - Perspectives and contextualisation of the topic**

The next section provides a broad historical perspective (background) and context to the topic. Include some of current schools of thought about your topic and very briefly review the literature in the area which supports some major findings. That is, who are people of note writing about the wider context of your topic and what did they find out? Allocate about a sentence per important person or finding. Include any preliminary findings you have thought about, which are supported by what the others say, and indicate what open questions are left. Finish this section by restating your question in this context, showing how it fits into this larger picture.

N.B. Some preliminary notes about writing a literature review. For your next assessment you will receive more elaborate notes about them.

A literature review, also termed a theoretical framework, involves a collection of information from other people's writings; a distillation or synthesis of these writings about previous research and a revealing of new insights on a stated issue.

Literature reviews can be a research project in themselves (although provokes a challenging problem in that as researcher you may find the perfect and beautifully succinct answer to your question in someone else's work!) In the meantime familiarity with the current and relevant literature by yourself and your supervisor is important. This is why it is interesting for a supervisor to read your correctly referenced work.

6. Methodology and methods

The next paragraph describes your methodology and methods. It tells how you will approach the question and then what you will need to get some data to answer it. For this assessment task you are not expected to produce evidence of a deep knowledge about methodology as you are being taught.

- **Methodology** is about describing the underlying design of your methods. How are you going to find out about your questions possible answer(s)
- **Methods** are the what to do bits and the hows of collecting data.
 - i. Approach
 - ii. Data needs - what sort of participant group are you going to study - and where, what kinds of equipment are you likely to need and how long might the study? Part of the purpose of doing this is to detect flaws in the plan before they become problems in the research.
 - iii. Briefly mention the ethical considerations of working with/ researching humans
 - iv. Analytic techniques – keep this very brief as at this stage in can be overly complicated.

7. Results and implications: The final paragraph of this section outlines your expected results, how you expect to analyse your findings, how you will interpret them, and how they will fit into the larger understanding i.e., 'the literature'. It is often useful from the very beginning of formulating your work to write a page for this section to focus your reasoning as you build the rest of the proposal.

8. Devote a couple of sentences to some of your surfaced and unanswered questions. This is where you present the holes in the knowledge that need to be plugged and by so doing, situate your work. It is the place where you establish that your work will fit in and be significant to our discipline.

9. Conclusion: This is a conclusion to your proposal not a conclusion to your research. Two – three sentences – don't start another proposal here: just speak to your audience.

10. Budget considerations

Most proposals require you to include a budget for the study – for this assessment you are not being asked to do that – just include the title “Budget considerations” in your Contents List.

11. References – This is not a bibliography – you are expected to find at least two original references, which you can then use in your Literature Review (Assessment Task 3 – Individual Research Project) and correctly reference (APA style) both these and the ones that each member of your group have located.

Writing tips:

Read a lot!

Use a systematic way of recording notes and bibliographic information from the very beginning. As easy way is to cut and paste the reference into an alphabeticised list – author's surname first and – update regularly

Free/ hand write about what you are thinking and/ or summarise regularly for your Blogs

Keep in mind this is not the last project you will be doing – reflect on the process, your strengths and challenges on the way. Don't hold too hard onto your belief set – be flexible and curious. What if is a great question beginner...

Cover your topic, but don't confuse it with too many loosely and irrelevant side lines. Put these aside though as they might make nice questions for future studies.

These notes have been resourced and adapted from Guidelines on writing a research proposal by Matthew McGranaghan cited 27 02 09 <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~matt/proposal.html>

Some other useful References:

Recent National Science Foundations Guidelines for Research Proposals can be found on the NSF website, www.nsf.gov.

Turabian, Kate. (1955). A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations, University of Chicago Press.

Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren. 1940 ('67, '72 etc). How to Read a Book. New York City, NY: Simon and Schuster Publishers.